

Testimony to the Labor Committee

3/13/12

Opposition to Raised Bill Number 5433

An Act creating a Procedure for Personal Care Attendants to Collectively Bargain With the State.

By Jamie Lazaroff, Self Advocate, Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

Chairman and members of the Labor committee, I thank you for letting me testify today. My name is Jamie Lazaroff; I am the Self Advocate Coordinator for The Arc of Quinebaug Valley and The Arc of Connecticut. I am also on the Governor's council on Developmental Services. Besides all these titles I am a person with an Intellectual disability who receives funding from the Department of Developmental Services to hire my own staff.

I rise in strong opposition to Raised Bill Number 5433: An Act creating a Procedure for Personal Care Attendants to Collectively Bargain With the State. The whole point of self-direction is called self-determination which means choice would be severely compromised by passage of this bill.

First off, I don't have care attendants, I don't need 24 hour home care, and I have direct support professionals. I need to hire my own staff to help me with residential support and vocational support. Don't we all need support, I am no different, and I just need little help, that's all. In the bill it should better define who would be covered.

I get 9 hours a week for residential supports and 13.5 hours a week for vocational support. A union might be good for staffs that are employed full-time but my staffs are part-time. The staff that enters this field knows that there is not a lot of money and we can't pay benefits. At a meeting last week the union promised our workers higher pay, if budgets are fixed, this would reduce hours of service. So the state would have to raise my rates to keep the status quo. How would you pay for this, the state has no money nor does the federal government. Also deeply troubling is the fact the bill does not require the arbitrator to have any knowledge or expertise about the DDS waivers nor does the bill require the arbitrator to even consider the waivers as a factor in a decision. This is like playing with half a squad versus a full squad in any sport. It is very disconcerting to me and many families that we had no say in any of these decisions. We feel like the low man on the totem pole and always getting dumped on. My workers, who have been with me for a long time and whom I have built a relationship with, never asked for the union to come in.

This bill does not protect the fundamentals of self-determination because the Workforce Council would determine the requirements of staff. We know the members of the Workforce Council mean well but there are no family members or self advocates on this council speaking on our behalf. Would you want others making decisions for you that do not have your best interest in mind?

Thank you for your time and consideration.